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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 007641

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2013

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: CENTER-RIGHT MOTHERLAND PARTY STRUGGLING
TO STAY AFLOAT

(U) Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter.
Reason: 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) Summary: Unable to regain political momentum or solve ANAP's deepening financial difficulties, colorless chairman Ozdemir resigned days before the party's Dec. 13-14 general convention. Former M.P. Nesrin Nas is likely to emerge as the next ANAP leader. However, her ability to boost ANAP's chances going in March 2004 local elections is undermined by her ties to corrupt former P.M. and ANAP chairman Mesut Yilmaz. The latter faces a parliamentary high court corruption charge but nevertheless is planning a political comeback, according to our contacts. End summary.

Sinking Ship

2. (C) At its general convention Dec. 13-14, Motherland Party (ANAP) will elect a new general chairman to replace Ali Talip Ozdemir, who announced is stepping down after only one, lackluster year. For months political insiders, e.g., former senior ANAP official and minister Vehbi Dincerler, have bemoaned Ozdemir's lack of the vision and charisma needed to be an effective party leader. With ANAP polling in the single digits (one poll from Nov. shows support at 3%), Ozdemir, our contacts say, decided to step aside to avoid further humiliation in local elections scheduled for March 2004.

3. (C) Former state minister and current ANAP vice chairman Mehmet Kececiler told us Dec. 5 that, in addition, Ozdemir lacked the fund-raising acumen needed to rescue the party from near-bankruptcy. Kececiler claimed that Ozdemir had been relying on funds from his father-in-law, a wealthy businessman who owns several Antalya resorts, to support the party's activities but that these funds had run dry. Moreover, Kececiler added, Ozdemir could not raise money from the businessmen who had formerly supported ANAP during the Turgut Ozal period. Vehbi Dincerler told poloffs Dec. 9 the party's financial situation is so dire that party executives are considering selling some of ANAP's property, including its offices in Istanbul. However, rejecting press speculation that ANAP plans to sell off its centrally located Ankara headquarters, Dincerler said this would amount to closing the party.

Who's Next?

4. (C) As the sole candidate for chairman, former ANAP M.P. Nesrin Nas, whose photograph has peppered the walls of ANAP headquarters well before the party congress, is set to emerge as Ozdemir's successor. In a Dec. 8 meeting with poloff, Nas admitted that some key ANAP board members still hope to derail her candidacy but that she expects to be elected at the party convention. She hopes to inject "new leadership and new ideas" into a party that she says is likely to do poorly next March. Nas claimed that ANAP is still strong in the Black Sea region and Istanbul. At the same time, she said, her goal is to stem the losses to no more than half of 600 elected municipalities that the party currently holds, mostly in those two regions. While indicating that she is not totally adverse to cooperating in the local elections with ANAP's center-right rival True Path Party (DYP), she criticized DYP chairman Mehmet Agar for his "negative image" and said DYP would need unspecified "new ideas" before such cooperation could take place.

5. (C) In describing her vision for ANAP, Nas adopted the language and policies often evinced by Ozdemir, suggesting that, if elected, Nas will represent a change of style versus substance. Nas offered vague support for USG Iraq policy, saying "the U.S. must succeed in Iraq; there is no alternative for Turkey." Like many of the ruling AK Party's opponents, Nas praised Erdogan's government for pursuing

EU-related political reform but questioned the GOT's ultimate intentions.

16. (C) Nas said she hoped to be Turkey's first "positive" role model for women in politics, an implicit criticism of former P.M. and DYP Chairman Tansu Ciller. However, our AK contacts say the women have more in common than Nas is willing to suggest. For example, like Ciller, Nas appears charming to many westerners because she speaks English and is able to converse in a seemingly intelligent way on the economy. Some, like Dincerler and a long-standing Embassy contact active in women's issues and center-right politics, have noted to us in recent days that Nas is shallow, out of touch with the majority of the population in Anatolia (Ciller enjoyed a frisson of popularity in the heartland), and suspiciously wealthy.

Yilmaz Stalking Horse?

17. (C) Our ANAP contacts -- including Kececiler, Dincerler, and long-time ANAP activist and Embassy contact Ali Turktas -- tell us Nas has long been associated with former ANAP leader Yilmaz, who, along with several former Ministers, is about to be examined by a parliamentary high court (Yuce Divan) for corruption. Nas would only say to us that Yilmaz "does not oppose" her candidacy; in the past she has told us more openly that she favors his comeback. Dincerler, who Dec. 10 resigned his position as advisor to the ANAP chairman, told us Nas' emergence probably means Yilmaz is planning an eventual comeback, which Dincerler claimed would destroy the party. Dincerler admitted that he privately hopes Nas becomes ANAP chairman, performs poorly, and is forced out so that the Yilmaz faction within the party will be discredited further. While acknowledging that Nas is likely paving the way for Yilmaz' return, Kececiler pointed out that Yilmaz will do nothing to pursue his comeback while the corruption investigation continues.

Comment

18. (C) Given its corrupt baggage, poor polling numbers, and apparent reluctance to cooperate with other center-right parties heading into the March elections, ANAP has poor prospects for revival as a credible national force. Nesrin Nas is glib and skilled at barbarian handling of westerners, and too clever by half. Although she has her son at university in the U.S., as an ally of Yilmaz she is moving in the political and business milieu tainted by the German and Russian lobbies. Our contacts at Parliament say Yilmaz is unlikely to emerge from the corruption investigation unscathed, making it unlikely that he will be able to creep back easily onto the political scene. End comment.
EDELMAN